

# PART I: ACTUAL ISSUES IN MODERN PEDAGOGY

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## **PRACTICAL TEACHING APPROACHES TO THE EDUCATION OF PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE GENERAL EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

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***Abstract:** Segregated education for children with special educational needs seems to violate their right to knowledge. This view has been adopted by many countries worldwide. Thus, these students should be included appropriately at mainstream schools. Inclusion is an ongoing procedure, which demands from the school to adapt according to the diverse needs of the students. There are certain strategies, which can be implemented in the school context and assist the successful inclusion of children with special educational needs. This assignment focuses on practical teaching approaches, which assist the education of pupils with special educational requirements in regular classes.*

***Keywords:** inclusion, SEN (special educational needs), Individualized Education Plan (IEP)*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Inclusive education is taken under consideration for the planning of educational policy around the world. Many countries have taken into account the education of students with special educational needs (SEN) (Lindsay, 2007). The last years, education policy does not support the opinion that segregated education is ideal for pupils with SEN. The United States of America promoted gradually "whole-school" approaches towards inclusion (Evans & Lunt, 2002) and European Union countries also established a legislation that promotes inclusion. UNESCO's Salamanca Statement certified officially the use of inclusion at education policy worldwide (UNESCO, 1994). Inclusive education is now perceived as fundamental to human rights and equal opportunities and according to inclusion policy; the focus is not on the student, but rather on the school system. School should reform and enhance its procedures, in order to assist each student (regardless of any possible special needs), and not the child *to be changed* to fit in established education structures and systems.

### **EVIDENCE FOR SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION**

Although moral and human rights imperatives drove governments to contain inclusion at their education policies, it is essential to explore the successfulness of inclusive strategies. Lindsay (2007) states the importance of separating the subjects of values and rights from the subject of the effectiveness of different educational strategies. Other researchers claimed that the collection of evidence revealing that

educational strategies are successful and not important when human rights are involved (Gallagher, 2001). However, inclusion approaches have to be explored, especially since evidence regarding the profits of inclusion is not clearly documented. Some studies showed that inclusive education offers to pupils with SEN benefits concerning social and academic aspects (Moore, Gilbreath & Maiuri, 1998; Peterson & Hittie, 2002). However, other studies did not prove the superiority of inclusive education (Sebba & Sachev, 1997). Some researchers attributed this variability not to the inefficiency of inclusion, but to the quality of the teaching in the mainstream school setting. Hence, the problem lies in the existing limitations in practice within school and not in the idea of inclusion (Farrell, 2000). Thus, we need to focus not on whether inclusion works, but rather on ways of making it work, which is the focus of the current paper.

### **KEY TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION**

Research outcomes showed that inclusion might take different forms in different contexts, but, in spite of these variances, there is significant agreement about the basic teaching strategies, which facilitate the successful implementation of inclusion (Lindsay, 2003). The development of inclusive school practices, like all best educational practices, needs to be a dynamic and evolving process. At this section, the author will refer to these strategies and analyze briefly how these can be implemented at mainstream school contexts, in order to facilitate inclusion of students with SEN.

Teachers should differentiate the instructions for children with SEN. Thus, they must be flexible enough when giving instructions, in order to meet the various demands of each kid and the rest of the class will benefit as well. The teacher is highly recommended to give the instructions for completing a task orally and in a writing form. He/she then has to encourage the pupil to repeat the instructions. In this way, misunderstandings can be avoided. He/she is advised to check if the directions in the written form are valid too. The directions must be clear and simple. He/she should also take into consideration the cognition level of the kid and use a language that the student understands. The tutor might consider giving individual instructions if needed. Another helpful approach, especially in more complicated directions, is the modelling of the appropriate procedure. The teacher can think out loudly and analyze problem-solving methods and shows multiple examples to individuals or small groups of children. With this strategy, he/she can discover if and where the student has any difficulties. Then he/she can guide the child appropriately. Moreover, the teacher ought to have knowledge of pupils' strengths and preferred learning styles. As a result, he/she can give directions in a way that the child is more likely to apprehend. In addition, he/she can encourage the student to respond or work using his/her preferred learning type (Algozzine et al, 1997).

The employment of scaffolding directions is also suggested in order to include students with SEN in regular classes (Bruner, 1975). According to this method, the teacher helps the child to accomplish tasks that he/she may have difficulties to perform on his/her own. This strategy aims to help the student to improve the abilities, which are in the process of development and are most amenable to skilled

teaching (Elliot, 2000). In practice, the teacher offers a gradual degree of assistance. When he/she feels that the student gains mastery of the ability or concept, the scaffold is gradually removed. Modelling of problem-solving and systematic sequencing of procedures are common practices of this intervention. The drawback of this intervention is the fact that the teacher has to work with one child and thus it is time consuming. Thus, the use of teaching assistants is recommended.

Children with *SEN* often need direct, explicit and intensive instruction during the lecture. The educator has to analyze the curriculum and the learning outcomes. Then he/she teaches in sequence each target, while explaining clearly what is being taught and the way of doing it. He/she provides tasks, to find out if the student has apprehended the new information. He/she should take care of ensuring that the level of difficulty is according to child's abilities. After the completion of the tasks, he/she gives feedback and correction. This intervention increases attention and enhances academic performance of students with *SEN* (Westwood, 2007).

Research findings propose the use of co-operative learning strategies, with the intention of creating successful inclusion in regular classrooms (Frederickson & Cline, 2002). According to literature, this method improves academic performance, behavior and school attendance. Furthermore, students' engagement with school is increasing (DES, 2007). Other research outcomes found that children with learning difficulties have increased social acceptability and better academic performance when co-operative learning is implemented (McMaster & Fuchs, 2006). Although social interaction is increasing through co-operative learning, this does not mean that the placement of the children with *SEN* into groups with their classmates will ensure that they will behave in a socially appropriate way (Ibid). Thus, teachers should monitor carefully the whole process. In practice, children should work together in small-group learning activities with the target of maximizing their own and each other's learning. This method has various forms; children can enter in informal, temporary cooperative learning groups for part of a class period, or they can form more formal cooperative learning groups working on a particular project for a longer time. The members of the group should support, encourage and assist each member of the group, in order to achieve better outcomes (DES, 2007).

Peer tutoring is also an approach that helps teachers to cater for various children's needs at regular classes (Frederickson & Cline, 2002). In peer tutoring intervention, pupils help each other to learn and in turn learn by teaching. One child acts as the tutor while the other is the learner. It involves kids of the same age assisting their classmates. Another option is cross-age tutoring, which involves children from older classes helping younger kids. This method has proved to produce academic and social benefits for both the tutor and the learner (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998). Studies also reveal that this intervention can improve self-esteem and social interactions (Bagley, & Mallick, 1996). Furthermore, it frees up the teacher, giving him/her time to give assistance that is more direct to individual pupils. Peer tutoring takes time and care to set up properly, but pays huge dividends. The teacher should consider carefully and form the student pairs. He/she should train them for the roles of tutor and tutee. Peer tutors need clear instructions and a particular task to complete. Ideal peer tutoring

tasks contain reviewing previously acquainted skills and knowledge. The aim is to practice these skills and improve them. If the peer-tutoring program is implemented satisfactorily, participation of students with *SEN* in regular classes is enhanced (Wilson, 2003). Thus, it is a valuable tool for achieving successful inclusion.

Co-teaching is a form of regularly scheduled collaboration between the mainstream class teacher and the special education teacher. This intervention has been proved effective with a range of pupils who need supplementary support in regular classes (Welch, 2000). There is a variety of methods of co-teaching strategy, which can significantly assist children with *SEN*. At the most popular co-teaching method, one tutor (usually the regular class teacher) teaches while the other assists him/her and support kids in need. It should be stated that both the teachers are present in the classroom. The first guides the teaching process, while the other checks children's apprehension and supports those who encounter problems. Another method is station teaching. Two teachers divide between them the content to be taught to the regular classroom. So each one teaches his/her agreed content. As a result, children receive two different teaching styles, which is particularly good for students with diverse needs. A third option is the alternative teaching where the regular class is divided into two groups, one small and one large. The regular class teacher usually guides the large group while the other teacher works with the small group (in which students with *SEN* usually belong). While this approach has the benefit of providing small-group guidance to those children who need it, this intervention risks creating a situation in which specific children are *pulled out* to the back of the classroom and thereby publicly identified as needing additional assistance.

The Individualized Education Plan (*IEP*) is considered a valuable tool for the inclusion of pupils with *SEN* in mainstream schools. The *IEP* is a written plan describing the special education program and services, which are required by a particular student and is based on a detailed evaluation of the child's strengths and deficiencies. The design of the pupil's *IEP* needs input from the teaching staff, the child itself, the parents and other specialists. It has to be regularly reviewed according to the child's features. Pupil's progress should be monitored, in order to discover if the agreed interventions were effective. If the targets are not achieved, teachers have to find the possible reasons. Students and parents must participate in the *IEP's* review and offer their views. Whenever it is needed, the *IEP* should be adapted, with the intention of satisfying child's needs and achieving the specified targets (McCausland, 2005).

Last, not only children do prefer to work in one particular way, but also teachers prefer to use one teaching method. However, this is not an effective strategy to assist students with diverse needs and promote an inclusive culture. The teaching methods must be adapted to the child's individual needs. Studies proved that a combination of strategies results in better outcomes than a single-strategy intervention (Rose & Howley, 2007). Thus, the teacher should implement a variety of teaching methods.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

To sum up, segregated education is considered to violate the children's rights to education. Inclusion is an ongoing process, which tries to identify and remove obstacles

from their learning procedure, and it focuses on students with *SEN*. Therefore, educational systems should try to create schools that encourage inclusion of pupils with *SEN* and teachers, being a vital part of this procedure, should employ multiple teaching strategies, in order to achieve effective inclusion of students with *SEN*. Peer tutoring, co-teaching, co-operative learning strategies and creation of *IEP* are advised. Moreover, differentiation of the instructions (direct, explicit and intensive instructions) during the lectures is considered very useful for students with *SEN*.

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